

Constantinople and the Coup d'État in Palaiologan Byzantium

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One of the many ways in which the Fourth Crusade represented a turning point in Byzantine history was that it ruptured for the first time the inviolability of the imperial capital's defenses in the face of foreign foes, an impregnability that had been one of the fundamental underpinnings of the empire's existence and outlook. Less obviously, it marked a transition in the development of a form of violence whose frequency in Constantinople's history contrasts with the rarity of foreign military intrusion: forcible internal changes of regime. Possession of the capital had always been critical for any attempt to seize supreme power, and Constantinople had been the venue for most of the empire's many coups d'état.¹ Since the city's foundation,

only rarely had its ruler been removed from power by action taken elsewhere.² From the Byzantine reconquest of 1261, Constantinople became once more and thereafter remained the stage on which clashes between contenders for the throne were settled. However, the mechanisms of these decisive struggles and the extent of their impact on the political leadership of the empire were transformed in ways suggestive of the changing character of city and empire.³

1 The most comprehensive resource on the history of rebellion in Byzantium before the Palaiologan era is J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990). This work, however, focuses on the sociopolitical context of revolts in the development of the Byzantine aristocracy and of the relations between capital and provinces and pays relatively little attention to the practicalities of seizing Constantinople. Studies paying more attention to such considerations in the earlier period, and to particular case studies can be found among those collected in A. Psaromelinkos and B. Lazu, eds., *Λαϊκές εξεγέρσεις στο Βυζάντιο* (Athens, 2011). A number of relevant articles also appear in A. Simpson, ed., *Byzantium, 1180–1204: "The Sad Quarter of a Century?"* (Athens, 2015). The role of the metropolitan populace in political strife has received significant attention, as in L. Garland, "Political Power and the Populace in Byzantium prior to the Fourth Crusade," *BSI* 52 (1992): 17–52; P. Charanis, "The Role of the People in the Political Life of the Byzantine Empire: The Period of the Comneni and the Palaeologi," *ByzSt* 5 (1978): 69–79. The most important recent contribution to

this field is that of Anthony Kaldellis, who has argued, as part of a far-reaching reassessment of the character of the Byzantine polity, that the empire's frequent forcible seizures of power were an expression of a prevailing ideology of popular sovereignty. This interpretation posits that the violent withdrawal of the people's consent from a reigning emperor was an accepted part of the political process, and stresses the decisive role of the people of Constantinople in changes of regime before 1204. A. Kaldellis, "How to Usurp the Throne in Byzantium: The Role of Public Opinion in Sedition and Rebellion," in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium: Papers from the Forty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 2010*, ed. D. Angelov and M. Saxby (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2013), 43–56; idem, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2015).

2 Emperors outside the city might be deposed in absentia through the seizure of Constantinople after a defeat in the field. Isaac II Angelos in 1195 was exceptional in being ousted by a coup directly targeting his person while away from the capital. Niketas Choniates, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. A. Van Dieten, CFHB 3 (Berlin and New York, 1975), 450–51; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 128–29n180.

3 In addition to their treatment in works dealing generally with the political history of the period, the dynamics of the internal conflicts of the Palaiologan era have been a particular subject of the studies

The era presents a substantial number of coups for comparison, reflecting the frequency with which attempts to seize power were made. This was in itself unremarkable: since the establishment of the monarchy, the empire had always been prone to such upheavals when it was in difficulties, and often even when it was not. Prolonged periods of internal peace were the exception rather than the rule. The sustained and severe political decline that Byzantium suffered from the late thirteenth century onward, with only brief interludes of modest recovery, naturally stoked discontent, undermined the credibility of reigning emperors, and pushed them toward contentious lines of policy, fueling pressure for a change of leadership. Specific impulses to conflict varied, as the policy concerns of a given time interacted with the perennial realities of individual and factional ambition as manifested in particular personalities and relationships. Insurrection in the late thirteenth century drew its main strength from Anatolian resentment of the overthrow of the Laskarid dynasty by the Palaiologoi, the deposition of the Patriarch Arsenios Autoreianos, perceived neglect of Anatolian interests after the removal of the capital to Constantinople, and dismay at the failure to halt the encroachment of the Turks.⁴ With the collapse of the imperial position in Asia at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Anatolian refugees carried their resentments and desperation to Europe, contributing to an atmosphere of unrest intensified by the disastrous war with the Catalan Grand Company.⁵ The struggles of the 1320s between Andronikos II Palaiologos and his grandson Andronikos III have been attributed in part to the efforts of displaced Anatolian landowners

to restore their fortunes as well as to general discontent with the direction of the empire.⁶ In the 1340s, conflict over control of the regency for the young John V Palaiologos tapped into social and economic tensions between aristocrats and other groups in the empire's towns and cities, fueling the longest civil war in Byzantine history. After the eventual triumph of John VI Kantakouzenos, the uneasy cohabitation of his family with John V dissolved into fresh warfare in the 1350s due to irreconcilable dynastic aspirations and enduring antagonism between their respective supporters.⁷ The recurrent conflicts of the later fourteenth century between John V, his sons, and his grandson have been linked to divisions over the empire's response to Ottoman expansion, pitting advocates of a policy of active resistance bolstered by ecclesiastical rapprochement with the Latin West against those favoring accommodation with the Turks and the rejection of religious compromise. These themes may also have contributed to the renewed unrest among the sons of Manuel II Palaiologos in the fifteenth century.⁸ With increasing prevalence, the empire's internal divisions were accentuated by the involvement of foreign powers—Serbs and Bulgarians, Genoese and Venetians, Aydın and Ottoman Turks—pursuing their own interests and those of their economic and social connections in the Byzantine elite. The backing of such sponsors helped contenders secure the wherewithal to initiate a challenge or to remain in contention after a defeat, increasing the incidence and persistence of civil strife.

Underlying the shifting particulars of personality and policy that generated them are the mechanisms and implications of the coups d'état carried out in the Palaiologan period. These display commonalities and trends that distinguish them from earlier eras and express the wider transformation of the empire over the course of its last centuries. The size of its territorial

of P. Charanis, "The Strife among the Palaeologi and the Ottoman Turks, 1370–1402," *Byzantion* 16 (1942–43): 286–314; idem, "Internal Strife in Byzantium during the Fourteenth Century," *Byzantion* 15 (1940–41): 208–30, reprinted in *Social, Economic and Political Life in the Byzantine Empire*, ed. P. Charanis (London, 1973), VI. Individual coups of the period have also been examined by specialized studies, as in D. M. Nicol, "The Abdication of John VI Cantacuzene," *ByzF* 2 (1967): 269–83; G. T. Kolias, "Η ἀνταρσία Ἰωάννου Ζ' Παλαιολόγου ἐναντίον Ἰωάννου Ε' Παλαιολόγου (1390)," *Ἑλληνικά* 12 (1951): 36–64. However, none of the works to date have focused on the distinctive qualities of the Palaiologan coups as a group.

4 A. E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282–1328* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 20–26, 76–89; D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453* (London, 1972), 75–81, 96–100, 123–25.

5 Laiou, *Constantinople*, 122, 164–65, 174, 191–98, 212–20.

6 R. Estangüi Gómez, *Byzance face aux Ottomans: Exercice de pouvoir et contrôle du territoire sous les derniers Paléologues (milieu XIV^e–milieu XV^e siècle)* (Paris, 2014), 38–43; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 153–57, 160.

7 Gómez, *Byzance*, 43–53; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 185–97, 237–40.

8 Gómez, *Byzance*, 254–69; T. Ganchou, "Autour de Jean VII: Luites dynastiques, interventions étrangères et résistance orthodoxe à Byzance," in *Coloniser au Moyen Âge*, ed. M. Balard (Paris, 1995), 367–81 at 372–81; N. Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge, 2009), 123–27, 131–37, 140–41.

base was sharply reduced, diminishing its financial and military resources and bringing foreign territories within easy reach of the capital, which had itself been greatly reduced in population. A shift toward an effective monopoly of the imperial office by a single dynasty was accompanied by the strengthening of existing trends toward family government that originated in the Komnenian era, a phenomenon that increasingly found geographical expression. The centrality of Constantinople in the practice of Byzantine government was reduced as the emperors increasingly assigned portions of the empire to relatives as "appanages," using familial ties to bind the empire's territories together and using territorial awards to heal familial divisions.⁹ These changes in the condition of the empire and the role of the capital contributed to parallel developments in Constantinopolitan coups d'état, affecting their possibilities, processes, and impact.

One expression of these changes lay in the means employed to seize the capital, the fulcrum on which the conflicts of the empire's high politics traditionally turned. Across Byzantine history, Constantinopolitan coups took three essential forms: the palace coup, the violence of which was confined to the court, the innermost of the concentric circles of imperial power; the uprising in the streets of Constantinople, within the city walls that defined the limits of the second circle; and the intrusion of an armed force from the third circle, the empire outside. Although the third circle was vastly preponderant in extent, population, and the scale of the available military forces, before 1204 it was typically action within the first and second circles that terminated a regime.

The palace coup had been the most common means for a forcible change of regime before the Fourth Crusade; Byzantine rulers were successfully ousted by such means on a dozen occasions, nearly always without any rebel force from the wider empire on hand.¹⁰

One exception to this was the seizure of power by Romanos I Lekapenos in 919, accomplished by collaboration between elements within the palace and the imperial fleet.¹¹

Coups through an uprising in the streets of the city had also taken place without the appearance of any external challenge on a number of occasions.¹² More frequently, however, these occurred at a time when a rebel army or fleet was nearby, usually on the Asian side of the Bosphoros, opposite Constantinople. In nearly all such cases, the regime fell without the rebel army making a direct attempt on the city.¹³ An

the brothers Stephen and Constantine Lekapenos against Romanos I in 944, of Constantine VII against the Lekapenos brothers in 945, of John I Tzimiskes against Nikephoros I in 969, of Michael IV Paphlagon against Romanos III Argyros in 1034, and of the supporters of Michael VII Doukas against Empress Eudokia and the absent Romanos IV Diogenes in 1071. John Malalas, *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, ed. H. Thurn, CFHB 35 (Berlin, 2000), 294–95, 301–2; Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia Theophanis*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Hildesheim and New York, 1980), 1:464–65, 471–73, 476–78, 492–93; Joseph Genesios, *Iosephi Genesii Regum Libri Quattuor*, ed. A. Lesmüller-Werner and H. Thurn, CFHB 14 (Berlin, 1978), 17–20, 80; Theophanes Continuatus, *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius monachus*, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB 45 (Bonn, 1838), 23, 37–40; Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris amplectitur*, ed. I. Ševčenko, CFHB 42 (Berlin, 2011), 106–8; Symeon the Logothete, *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon*, ed. S. Wahlgren, CFHB 44 (Berlin, 2006), 208, 213–14, 256–59, 340–41; John Skylitzes, *Byzanz wieder ein Weltreich: Das Zeitalter der makedonischen Dynastie*, ed. H. Thurn (Graz, 1983), 5, 21–23, 113–14, 234–36, 279–81, 390–91; Leo the Deacon, *Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historia, scriptoresque alii ad res Byzantinas pertinentes*, ed. C. B. Hase (Paris, 1819), 85–91; Michael Psellos, *Leben der byzantinischen Kaiser (976–1075)*, ed. D. R. Reinsch (Berlin, 2015), 49–50, 274–75; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. E. Tsolakis, CFHB 50 (Athens, 2011), 130; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Nicéphore Bryennios Histoire*, ed. P. Gautier, CFHB 9 (Brussels, 1975), 123–25; John Zonaras, *Ioannis Zonarae Annales*, ed. M. Pinder, 3 vols., CSHB 47–49 (Bonn, 1841–97), 3:584–85, 704; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 22–23, 44–45, 75–76 (nos. 5, 36, 94).

11 Symeon the Logothete, *Chronicon*, 306–9.

12 These cases include the replacement of Justinian II by Leontios in 695, of Michael V Kalaphates by Zoe and Theodora in 1042, and of Andronikos I Komnenos by Isaac II Angelos in 1185. Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, ed. C. Mango, CFHB 13 (Washington, DC, 1990), 94–98; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:368–69; Skylitzes, *Byzanz*, 418–21; Psellos, *Leben*, 93–106; Attaleiates, *Historia*, 11–13; Zonaras, *Annales*, 3:609–12; Choniates, *Historia*, 341–48; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 54–55, 119 (nos. 56, 163).

13 Rebel armies were present on the Asian side of the Bosphoros at the time of the coups that installed Constans II in 641, Nikephoros I

9 D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London, 1975), 2:87–103; J. W. Barker, "The Problem of Appanages in Byzantium during the Palaeologan period," *Byzantina* 3 (1971): 105–22; Gómez, *Byzance*, 58–61.

10 These included the coups of Leo I against the *magister militum* Aspar in 471, of Basiliskos against Zeno in 475, of Constantine VI against Irene in 802, of Michael I Rangabe against Staurakios in 811, of Michael II against Leo V the Armenian in 821, of Basil I against Michael III in 867, of Romanos I Lekapenos against the regency of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos in 919, of Constantine VII and

exception was the overthrow of Phokas by Herakleios in 610: when the challenger arrived before the city with his fleet and attacked the Harbor of Sophia, an uprising began inside the city and dissident soldiers stormed the palace.¹⁴ Even in this instance, individuals within the walls took the conclusive action. On each of these occasions, the successful challengers had made arrangements in advance with allies inside the city to instigate the rising that toppled the incumbent, but the presence of the challenger's army or fleet before the capital was seemingly a significant factor in enabling such plotters to ignite a general uprising. It provided a vivid demonstration of the incumbent's loss of control in the wider empire and the support commanded there by the challenger, and would have reassured sympathizers within the walls that with such assistance at hand they need not fear any retaliation, while correspondingly discouraging those who might otherwise defend the current rulers.¹⁵

If the incumbent regime remained defiant and forces in the palace or in the city did not act to oust it, the army of a challenger could succeed only by gaining entry to the capital themselves. This too usually required inside help. In the absence of the emperor, a rebel army might be admitted to Constantinople without resistance.¹⁶ Otherwise, the strength of

Constantinople's defenses was as formidable an obstacle to assault for domestic challengers as for foreign invaders, insulating the capital from the direct application of outside military force.¹⁷ It seems to have been overcome only once by a Byzantine army, when Constantine V stormed the single line of walls at Blachernai in 743.¹⁸ Generally an armed incursion required the attackers either to find some secret route by which an advance party could bypass the defenses and enter covertly, or to gain access through the help of supporters inside who opened gates or otherwise breached the defenses to let the attackers in. The former means served Justinian II on his return to power in 705: he slipped into Constantinople through the aqueduct after failing to elicit a favorable response from those inside.¹⁹ The latter was accomplished by Tiberios III in 698 and by Theodosios III in 715, who had each laid siege to the city and were admitted by confederates who opened gates at Blachernai.²⁰ Inside assistance was evidently also responsible for the return to power in 475 of Zeno, who crossed the Bosphoros with troops and entered the capital unopposed and to general acclamation, before his appearance became known to the incumbent Basiliskos.²¹ In the most exceptional of cases, the defenses could be negated by a total surprise, equivalent to that of a palace coup, but carried out by a substantial force entering the city from outside: in 713,

in 963, Isaac I Komnenos in 1057, Nikephoros III Botaneiates in 1078, and Andronikos I in 1182. The fall of Maurice in 602 was triggered by the approach of Phokas's rebel army from the European side. Theophylact Simocatta, *Theophylacti Simocattae Historia*, ed. C. de Boor (Stuttgart, 1972), 297–303; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 80–84; Skylitzes, *Byzanz*, 257–59, 493–500; Leo, *Historia*, 44–48; Psellos, *Leben*, 211–27; Attaleiates, *Historia*, 44–47, 207–9; Bryennios, *Histoire*, 243–49; Zonaras, *Annales*, 657–66; Choniates, *Historia*, 245–47; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 20–21, 68–69, 84–85 (nos. 1, 80, 105).

14 L. Dindorf, ed., *Chronicon Paschale*, 2 vols., CSHB 11–12 (Bonn, 1832), 1:699–701; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 34–36; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:298–99.

15 Kaldellis observes that Justinian I's suppression of the Nika revolt in 532 was the only occasion when an emperor determinedly or successfully opposed a major uprising in the capital by force (Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic* [n. 1 above], 90–91, 121). However, the tendency for coups in the city, in contrast to palace coups, to be triggered by the appearance of rebel armies suggests that their presence could be an important factor in the readiness of the discontented in the city to rise up, and perhaps in the readiness of those in power to surrender. As will be seen, in the Palaiologan period threatened regimes did on occasion use soldiers to intimidate the population into quiescence at times of trouble.

16 This occurred in the case of the overthrow of Justinian II by Philippikos in 711, after the emperor had left the city with his

army, and in that of Constantine V by Artabasdos in 742, when the emperor's representative in the city, secretly in league with Artabasdos, told the inhabitants that Constantine had died after a defeat in battle. Nikephoros, *Short History*, 112, 134; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:380, 415.

17 The significance of this impregnability in setting the conditions for Byzantine political violence is suggested by the contrast between the norms of pre-1204 Byzantine coups and those of coups in earlier periods of Roman history. Apart from some palace coups, from the late Republic until the beginning of the sixth century violent changes of regime had virtually always been the work of the army, whether field forces or guard units. Only behind the walls of Constantinople did the civilian populace of the capital become an arbiter of the survival or overthrow of emperors. Cf. Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, 109–10.

18 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 136; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:419–20.

19 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 102; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:374.

20 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 98–100, 118; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:370–71, 385–86.

21 Malalas, *Chronographia*, 302–3.

soldiers stationed in Thrace entered the city through the Golden Gate and proceeded to the palace, where they caught Philippikos quietly relaxing in the baths, unaware of any impending trouble.²²

For those who raised insurrection in the wider empire but failed to secure assistance from inside the capital, the prospects were bleak, no matter how overwhelming the strength of the rebel army. The army of Leo Phokas disintegrated while still on the Asian side of the Bosphoros in 919.²³ Leo Tornikios in 1047 and Nikephoros Bryennios in 1078 attacked the city without success, while Thomas the Slav pursued a prolonged siege by land and sea in 821–22.²⁴ All three concentrated their main efforts against the weaker defenses at Blachernai, but to no avail. They had all reportedly hoped to be admitted by those within but were disappointed, underlining the importance of inside support; indeed, Thomas is described as beginning to despair even before launching his attack.²⁵

From the restoration of Byzantine rule to Constantinople after the era of the Latin Empire, the mechanics of violent regime change displayed a different pattern from that described above. Plots for coups within the walls were still hatched but ceased to take practical effect. The hitherto relatively unusual incursion from outside the city became commonplace, and in the event became the invariable means for successful changes of regime. One of the closest precedents in earlier times for the Palaiologan norms was the coup of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081. Having laid siege to the city he suborned the Nemitzoi, the German soldiers holding a portion of the walls, to help his men enter through the Gate of Charisios during his assault. This was a novelty in that the intrusion was accomplished through the main land walls rather than at Blachernai. Alexios's army then dispersed to sack the city, rendering them vulnerable. Nikephoros III Botaneiates, having failed to bring the rival rebel force of Nikephoros Melissenos across the straits, resisted the exhortations

of his advisors to counterattack and agreed to abdicate.²⁶ The means of gaining access, the dangerous prospect of a counterattack drawing on outside reinforcements, and the incumbent emperor's decision to capitulate resonate with later events. However, in significant respects this coup belonged to a discernibly different era, given that the context after the Fourth Crusade was altered by the diminished scale of the urban population and the armed forces involved. The open siege and assault launched by Alexios represented a markedly different approach from that taken in the coups of the early Palaiologan period, though it more closely resembled those that occurred later with Ottoman backing. As the last of a string of coups in which contenders from a range of different aristocratic families seized power or fell narrowly short of doing so, and as the achievement of a senior central field-army commander, the political context of Alexios's coup also contrasts with the later period. Alexios himself laid the foundations of a dynastic mode of government whose further extension would create markedly different conditions for political conflict in the Palaiologan era.²⁷

The new practicalities created by the changes of the thirteenth century were first seen in the restoration of Byzantine control in 1261, an event foreshadowing the coups of the Palaiologan era. According to George Pachymeres, representatives of the community of *thelematarioi*, who lived inside the city but cultivated the land beyond the walls, approached the Nicaean general Alexios Strategopoulos, commander of a modest force of Nicaean and Cuman troops ordered by Michael VIII Palaiologos to raid the suburbs of Constantinople on their way to objectives elsewhere. They told Strategopoulos that much of the Latin garrison

22 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 116–18; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 1:383.

23 Symeon the Logothete, *Chronicon*, 310–12.

24 Genesis, *Libri*, 24–31; Symeon the Logothete, *Chronicon*, 214–15; Skylitzes, *Byzanz*, 32–41, 438–42; Psellos, *Leben*, 152–61; Bryennios, *Histoire*, 233–37; Zonaras, *Annales*, 3:627–31, 716–17.

25 Skylitzes, *Byzanz*, 34.

26 The sources disagree as to the exact means by which the defenses were traversed. Anna Komnene says that an advance party was secretly admitted to a tower held by the Nemitzoi and opened the adjoining gates when the attack came. According to Zonaras, the Nemitzoi attacked the defenders of the wall adjacent to their tower, overwhelming them in combination with the attackers outside, who were then able to scale the wall with ladders and break open the gates with axes; the defenders of the second wall then panicked and fled, enabling it to be stormed and the inner gate opened. A. Komnene, *Alexiade: Règne de l'Empereur Alexis I Comnène, 1081–1118*, ed. B. Leib, 4 vols. (Paris, 1943–76), 1:90–95; Zonaras, *Annales*, 3:727–30; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 89–90 (no. 113).

27 P. Magdalino, "Innovations in government," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett and D. Smythe (Belfast, 1996), 146–66; E. Malamut, *Alexis I^{er} Comnène* (Paris, 2007), 125–52, 183–85, 267–87.

was absent attacking the island of Daphnousia in the Black Sea. A plan was laid to attempt a covert entry to Constantinople by night. The thelematarioi used ladders to climb onto the walls near the Gate of the Pege and threw the guards from the top; they then demolished a drystone wall blocking the gate and opened it to allow in the attackers, whose scanty numbers were soon augmented by a general uprising of thelematarioi.²⁸ George Akropolites gives a somewhat different account, in which a small advance party guided by the thelematarioi gained covert access through an opening (ὀπήν), threw the guards from the wall, and broke open the gate.²⁹ The later account of Nikephoros Gregoras, who follows Akropolites' version, puts the number of Strategopoulos's troops at eight hundred and specifies that the advance party's means of access was an underground tunnel.³⁰ By all accounts, the Latin emperor Baldwin II then fled by ship and Strategopoulos reacted to the return of the fleet from Daphnousia by setting fire to the Latin quarter. This induced the men of the fleet to bring their now-destitute women and children aboard and leave, rather than land to defend their homes, families, and property.³¹

Whatever the precise details, the pattern set by the mechanisms of the reconquest can be seen repeatedly in the successful internal seizures of power during the next hundred years: the stealthy approach by night of a small armed force that through subterfuge, the infiltration of a small advance party, or the covert assistance of inside supporters, arranges for the opening of a gate and takes by surprise a city hitherto quietly under enemy control. To an extent this precedent was set accidentally, since Michael VIII, whose military resources were considerable by the standards of the time, was planning a large-scale attack by land and sea, underpinned by the Genoese alliance forged earlier that year

through the Treaty of Nymphaion.³² It was seemingly only by chance that the approach of the Nicaean force coincided with the absence of much of the Latin garrison, and only through the initiative of the thelematarioi that Strategopoulos learned of this opportunity.³³ According to Akropolites, Michael VIII had hoped the previous year to be admitted to Constantinople by a Latin contact in charge of one of the gates, but he pursued this scheme in the context of a conventional siege of Pera by a large army.³⁴

The circumstances of the 1261 upheaval differed in important ways from those that followed, most obviously in the culturally and ideologically alien character of the Latin Empire, which created a marked divide between the city's rulers and its remaining native population. Despite a degree of accommodation between these groups, the regime's claim on the loyalties of many of the inhabitants was more obviously precarious than would be the case in the internal conflicts of the restored Byzantine Empire.³⁵ Nonetheless, the context and character of the reconquest reflected significant and persistent changes that would shape later struggles for power. The condition of the Latin Empire resembled that of Byzantium in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, after a few intervening decades of relative strength, in both the diminished population of the city and the exiguous resources of the empire as a whole. The fact that a military operation as modest as the attack on Daphnousia could critically weaken the city's defenses underlines the vulnerability resulting from the shrunken resources of the city's rulers.

The new pattern is clearly visible in the three successful coups of the mid-fourteenth century, the mechanisms of which can be closely studied. Like the events

28 George Pachymeres, *Georges Pachymères, Relations Historiques*, ed. A. Failler, trans. V. Laurent, 5 vols., CFHB 24 (Paris, 1984–2000), 1:191–203.

29 George Akropolites, *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, ed. A. Heisenberg, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1978), 1:181–82.

30 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina Historia*, ed. I. Bekker and L. Schopen, 3 vols., CSHB 25–27 (Bonn, 1829–55), 1:83–87.

31 Pachymeres, *Relations*, 1:199–203; Akropolites, *Opera*, 1:182–83; Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:86.

32 D. J. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West, 1258–1282: A Study in Byzantine–Latin Relations* (Cambridge, MA, 1959), 81–91.

33 Ibid., 92–110; O. Cristea, “Le reconquête byzantine de Constantinople et l'action vénitienne à Daphnousia,” *Il Mar Nero* 4 (1999/2000): 137–42.

34 Pachymeres, *Relations*, 1:157–59, 169, 171–77; Akropolites, *Opera*, 1:174–75; Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:80–81; Manuel Holobolos, *Manuelis Holoboli Orationes*, ed. M. Treu, 2 vols. (Potsdam, 1906–7), 1:43–44; Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael*, 76–79.

35 D. Jacoby, “The Greeks of Constantinople under Latin Rule—1204–1261,” in *The Fourth Crusade: Event, Aftermath, and Perceptions; Papers from the Sixth Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East, Istanbul, Turkey, 25–29 August 2004*, ed. T. F. Madden (Aldershot, 2008), 53–73.

of 1261, each is described in detail by contemporary narrative histories, with the benefit of more than one account of each and the added advantage that one of these sources is the work of John VI Kantakouzenos, who had been second-in-command of the forces that staged the first coup, leader of the second, and target of the third.

In 1328 Andronikos III made an agreement with two of the guards responsible for the walls near the Gate of St. Romanos. Under the cover of darkness on the night of 23 May, the conspirators got their comrades drunk and then lowered ropes over the wall to pull up two ladders brought up by an advance party of the attacking force. According to Kantakouzenos, as he and Andronikos brought up a larger contingent, the alarm was raised, but despite the collapse of one of the ladders under the weight of the soldiers they were able to climb onto the walls and take control of a stretch of the defenses. Troops sent to investigate the uproar were surprised to find the enemy already within the walls. Their commander was captured and the soldiers gave up the struggle, acclaiming Andronikos III. This switch in allegiance spread through the city's defenders, and the gates were opened to let in the remainder of the attacking force of eight hundred. They were soon joined by the remainder of Andronikos's army, which had waited at the nearby village of Amblyopos.³⁶ The regime of Andronikos II succumbed without further opposition. Gregoras states that the approach of the first attacking force was spotted by the inhabitants of a village near the walls, who raised the alarm at the Gate of Gyrolimne near the Blachernai Palace, about a mile away. On hearing this, Andronikos II wished to reinforce the defenders of the walls but was dissuaded by his chief minister, Theodore Metochites, who cast doubt on the veracity of the report and was in any case dismissive of the threat that the younger emperor's forces could pose to the existing defenses. When alerted by

further reports that the attackers had entered the city, along with the sounds of fighting and acclamations of his grandson, the older emperor was left powerless to resist, as his soldiers had abandoned him.³⁷

On the night of 2 February 1347, John VI's supporters within Constantinople broke through the walled-up Golden Gate, enabling his force of over one thousand men to slip into the city quite undetected. Having entered, the challenger faced no serious resistance and received widespread acclamation from the inhabitants. The defensible precinct around the Blachernai Palace was held against him by the supporters of Empress Anna of Savoy. She summoned help from the Genoese in Pera and sought to incite the populace against John VI, but his forces, helped by some of the inhabitants of Constantinople, drove off the Genoese galleys. Negotiations in the following days produced no result. According to Kantakouzenos himself this refusal to submit infuriated his supporters, especially those who had until now been prisoners in Constantinople, and also the populace, who objected to the futile prolongation of the conflict. Eventually frustrated officers launched an attack which stormed the seaward part of the Blachernai compound and the empress finally came to terms.³⁸

John V Palaiologos succeeded in seizing the city in 1354, following an unsuccessful attempt to gain control of the capital in more traditional fashion in 1353. On that occasion, the young emperor had sailed to Constantinople and openly displayed himself before the walls, in the hope of being admitted by his numerous supporters among the general population. He was thwarted by the regime's security measures, which quelled any unrest within the city, and gave up the attempt after three days.³⁹ Like other successful coups of the period, John V's second bid for the city was instead undertaken covertly, though apparently without inside help in penetrating the defenses. The emperor arrived on the night of 28 November 1354 with a flotilla

36 John Kantakouzenos, *Ioannis Cantacuzeni ex Imperatoris Historiarum Libri IV*, ed. L. Schopen, 3 vols., CSHB 5–7 (Bonn, 1828–32), 1:291–92, 300–306; Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:419–26. According to Kantakouzenos, the advance party with the ladders numbered twenty-four; two hundred men advanced on foot, led by Andronikos III and Kantakouzenos, supported by one hundred cavalry and accompanied by mounts for the leading contingent in case a speedy withdrawal became necessary; an additional five hundred men followed at a greater distance. Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 1:301–2.

37 Gregoras puts the number of the advance party at eighteen and concurs with Kantakouzenos in putting the total number of soldiers at over eight hundred. Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:420–42.

38 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 2:600–602, 604–15; Gregoras, *Historia*, 2:773–79.

39 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:255–56; Gregoras, *Historia*, 3:186–87. According to Gregoras, on this occasion John V arrived with one trireme and eighteen biremes, monoremes, and boats; Kantakouzenos reports that he had one trireme and a few monoremes.

and gained access through the Heptaskalon Harbor.⁴⁰ A detailed account of the entry into the city is given by Doukas, writing a century later with likely embellishment. He describes how in stormy weather the sailors feigned a shipwreck and appealed to the guards at an otherwise unattested Gate of the Hodegetria to help salvage the cargo; the attackers, numbering two thousand, ambushed the emerging guards and poured into the city.⁴¹ By all accounts, their entry was followed by an uprising in support of the young emperor, while John VI, like Anna of Savoy before him, held out within the defensive perimeter of Blachernai, where his Catalan mercenaries set fire to surrounding buildings to drive back the attackers. He appealed for reinforcements from Thrace but soon came to a negotiated settlement.⁴²

The detailed accounts available in these cases display some enigmatic peculiarities regarding the means of traversing the defenses, the critical test for any coup attempt of this type. All accounts of these events give the impression that only a single defensive wall had to be overcome. This seems quite natural in the case of 1354, when John V's forces entered through the sea walls.⁴³ However, in the coups of 1328 and 1347, as in

the reconquest of 1261, the attackers crossed the main landward defenses, where the city was protected by two lines of walls and towers preceded by a moat backed by a low breastwork. This contrasts with earlier eras, in which only Alexios I Komnenos had traversed the main land walls; efforts to take the city by subterfuge or storm had otherwise focused on the single-walled Blachernai sector. Since the Palace of Blachernai was the main imperial residence in this period, it seems likely that the defense forces in the vicinity would tend to be more numerous, loyal, capable, and vigilant than elsewhere, dissuading covert intruders from targeting this more weakly fortified zone as the attackers of earlier eras had done.

It could be that for reasons of economy guards were at times posted only on one of the two main lines of walls. However, the sheer physical obstruction presented by wall and gate alone would have been formidable: even the outer wall, the lower of the two, was about nine meters high.⁴⁴ Yet for all their vivid circumstantial detail, no narrative of any of the fourteenth-century coups so much as hints at the need to scale more than one wall or open more than one gate to enter the city. This could mean that the gates of one line of walls were left open at all times, or that one line was always in such poor repair that gaps existed through which attackers could pass without difficulty. However, the possibility that the gates of one line were left unbarred at night seems supremely unlikely, especially given that anxieties over security actually led to the walling up of gates. The blocked state of the Gate of the Pege in 1261 and the Golden Gate in 1347 have already been mentioned, and during the siege mounted by John VII with Ottoman help in 1390, all gates except one were reportedly walled up so as to prevent his sympathizers inside the city from opening them.⁴⁵

40 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:284; Gregoras, *Historia*, 3:241–42, 247; P. Schreiner, ed., *Die Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, 3 vols., CFHB 12 (Vienna, 1975–79), 1:182 (no. 22/16); Nicol, “Abdication” (n. 3 above), 270–74.

41 Doukas, *Istoria Turco-Bizantina (1341–1462)*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest, 1958), 67–69. For the problems with Doukas's account, see Nicol, “Abdication,” 275–79. The figure of two thousand men is given by Doukas but seems reasonably consistent with contemporary testimony: Gregoras states at one point that the force consisted of two large triremes and sixteen monoremes and at another that John V was reported to have one trireme and a number of biremes and monoremes. Supposing a plausible complement of two hundred men for each of the larger vessels and one hundred for the smaller ones would give a figure equivalent to that of Doukas. Kantakouzenos refers again to one trireme and a number of monoremes. A short chronicle states that John had a single trireme.

42 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:284–307; Gregoras, *Historia*, 3:242–43; Doukas, *Istoria*, 69–71; Nicol, “Abdication,” 279–80.

43 Michael VIII is said to have added a second line of sea walls, but no trace of this has been found. There is considerable doubt whether it was ever built or if so whether it was a permanent structure. Pachymeres, *Relations* (n. 28 above), 2:469; W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls: Byzantion, Konstantinopolis, Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1977), 314; A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople: The Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (London, 1899), 189.

44 Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople*, 51–58; B. C. P. Tsangadas, *The Fortifications and Defense of Constantinople* (Boulder, CO, and New York, 1980), 7–15; M. Philippides and W. K. Hanak, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453: Historiography, Topography, and Military Studies* (Farnham, UK, 2011), 306–10.

45 Ignatios of Smolensk, “Journey to Constantinople,” in *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. and trans. G. P. Majeska (Washington, DC, 1984), 48–113 at 100–101. This gate is identified as being the one near the Monastery of the Prodromos; supposing that the monastery in question was the Stoudios, this would presumably mean either the Golden Gate or the Second Military Gate.

The possibility that the walls were routinely in such bad repair as to allow one line to be passed without difficulty is somewhat more credible. According to Pachymeres, their poor state of repair at the time of the reconquest of 1261 made it possible to get in and out of the city even when the gates were shut, though it may be questioned whether such deficiencies were great enough to allow the speedy entry of hundreds of men.⁴⁶ The walls are known to have been significantly damaged by earthquakes in 1231, 1343, and 1354.⁴⁷ However, as might well be imagined in the perilous situation of city and empire, such destruction was countered by repairs and strengthening. Michael VIII repaired and enhanced the walls to face the threat of Charles I of Anjou, while Andronikos II also carried out extensive restoration work on the fortifications, notably in 1317.⁴⁸ In 1344, the year after they had suffered severe earthquake damage, the regency regime took great pains to repair the land walls to withstand John VI, and it is explicitly stated that this work took place along the whole length from Blachernai to the Golden Gate and applied to all three lines of defense.⁴⁹ While emperor, John VI had much work done on the defenses, including augmentation of the sea walls and the creation of a powerful citadel at the Golden Gate, later revived by John V.⁵⁰ The walls were again said to be in a dilapidated state around the later 1410s.⁵¹ However, prolonged work was also carried out under John VIII Palaiologos in the 1430s and 1440s.⁵² The amount of

attention given to the city's defenses, including repair programs shortly before each of the successful coups of the first half of the fourteenth century, makes it most doubtful that the walls were in such a state of dereliction as to account for the unobstructed passage of one of the major lines of defense.⁵³

A new phase in the history of Palaiologan coups d'état opens with the overthrow of John V by his son Andronikos IV Palaiologos in 1376.⁵⁴ From this point on, the stealthy approach ceased to be a normal feature of coup attempts and was replaced by the open appearance of an army before the walls. Unfortunately, there is a stark reduction in the amount of information available about these events, due to the break in the sequence of Byzantine historiography after the works of Kantakouzenos and Gregoras. However, some details of the later fourteenth-century coups can be stitched together from the scanty notices of Greek short chronicles and the testimony of chance witnesses, supplemented with due caution by the much later and often unreliable narratives of Laonikos Chalkokondyles and Doukas.⁵⁵

Développement urbain et répertoire topographique (Paris, 1950), 251, 255–59, 265.

53 Leonardo of Chios reported that at least the inner line of the land walls were in need of repair in 1453. Alleging the embezzlement of funds assigned for repair work as the Ottoman attack loomed, he states that the wall was seriously damaged by weather and neglect, but that it could have been made fit for use if repairs had been undertaken in a timely fashion. Leonardo reports further that he had argued vociferously that the defense should have been focused on the inner line, which could have been made ready if work had begun in good time. His reports indicate that the structure was essentially sound and that it remained a viable line of defense at this time. Leonardo of Chios, *Historia Constantinopolitanae urbis a Mahumete II capta per modum epistole die 15 Augusti anno 1453 ad Nicolaum V Rom. Pont.*, PG 159:923–44 at col. 936.

54 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken* (n. 40 above), 1:67, 96, 106 (nos. 7/17, 9/32, 11/5).

55 Besides the publications cited below, regarding the events of 1376–79, see also J. Chrysostomides, "Studies on the Chronicle of Caroldo, with Special Reference to the History of Byzantium from 1370 to 1377," *OCP* 35 (1969): 123–82 at 153–59, 168–69; Manuel II Palaiologos, *Funeral Oration on His Brother Theodore*, ed. J. Chrysostomides, CFHB 26 (Thessalonike, 1985), 101–9; Demetrios Kydones, *Démétrius Cydones Correspondance*, ed. R.-J. Loenertz, 2 vols. (Vatican, 1956–60), 2:103–10 (no. 222); P. Charanis, "Les Βραχέα Χρονικά comme source historique: An Important Short Chronicle of the Fourteenth Century," *Byzantion* 13 (1938): 335–62 at 352–55; G. T. Dennis, *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica, 1382–1387*, OCA 159 (Rome, 1960), 28–29, 41–42.

46 Pachymeres, *Relations*, 1:215.

47 Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:460, 2:694–95, 3:221, 223; Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:83, 175 (nos. 8/39, 20/4).

48 Pachymeres, *Relations*, 1:251, 2:469; Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:124, 275, 469–70; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 293; Van Millingen, *Constantinople*, 126; A.-M. Talbot, "The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII," *DOP* 47 (1993): 243–61 at 249.

49 Gregoras, *Historia*, 2:711; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 294; Van Millingen, *Constantinople*, 104.

50 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:292–93; Gregoras, *Historia*, 3:84; Doukas, *Istoria*, 76; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 297; Van Millingen, *Constantinople*, 69–71; S. G. Bassett, "John V Palaiologos and the Golden Gate in Constantinople," in *To Ἑλληνικόν: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, vol. 1, *Hellenic Antiquity and Byzantium*, ed. J. S. Langdon et al. (New Rochelle, NY, 1993), 117–33.

51 Joseph Bryennios, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ τοῦ Βρυεννίου τὰ εὐρεθέντα*, ed. E. Boulgaris, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1768), 2:273–82; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 187.

52 Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*, 294, 305; Van Millingen, *Constantinople*, 104–7, 126; R. Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*:

There is some disagreement about Andronikos IV's entry into the city on 12 August 1376. One chronicle states that he entered the city by the Gate of the Pege but another names the Xylokerkos Gate.⁵⁶ The former states that he had besieged the city for thirty-two days, indicating that this coup unfolded in a markedly different fashion from its predecessors. Andronikos was aided by Ottoman troops supplied by Murad I, and by the Genoese.⁵⁷ Though his approach was not covert, his entry into the city seems to have been, since another chronicle says it was achieved by stealth (λάθρα).⁵⁸ Chalkokondyles presents Andronikos as boasting to Murad beforehand that many of the best-born and richest men in Constantinople were his supporters and would have come out for him openly had they not wished to work for his cause from within.⁵⁹ This account could derive from retrospective knowledge that such a fifth column had in fact facilitated his coup. Andronikos certainly had considerable aristocratic backing, and it may be that he had already begun to attract the popular support from which his son John VII would later benefit.⁶⁰ It may have been some of these adherents who contrived the admission of Andronikos's forces. One chronicle states that after his entry there was fighting within the city for three days between Byzantines and Genoese, in which 160 Genoese were killed.⁶¹ John V took refuge with his younger sons Manuel II and Theodore in the fortress at the Golden Gate, and it was not until October that they were induced to surrender and were imprisoned.⁶²

Andronikos's coup thus conformed to Palaiologan precedents in its covert entry of an armed force into

a city held by the incumbent regime and probably in the role of supporters inside in bringing this about. However, the most exact correspondence is with the cases in earlier centuries of such inside helpers admitting armies openly besieging the city. This altered pattern, also seen in 1390 and the abortive attempt of 1442, may be attributable to the fact that the challengers on each occasion enjoyed Ottoman military assistance, giving them a preponderance of force in the open that may have made such a confrontational approach seem more appealing.⁶³

Even less information is available on the mechanics of the coup that restored John V to power on 1 July 1379: it is stated only that he, Manuel, and Theodore, having escaped from prison and gained the support of Murad, entered the city through the Gate of Charisios, forcing Andronikos to flee to Pera.⁶⁴ Andronikos's Genoese supporters resisted the new regime in a "castello" in Constantinople (perhaps the fortress at the Golden Gate), which was eventually subdued with the help of a Venetian fleet that arrived some days later.⁶⁵

The violence of 1390 is somewhat better documented than the coups of the 1370s through the account of the Russian visitor Ignatios of Smolensk. It began with the bid for power by the young John VII, whose

63 Doukas gives an entirely different account of Andronikos's accession, having him enter the city under an agreement with John V before seizing and imprisoning his father and brothers. However, his version of these events is hopelessly confused, placing them after a prolonged war between Andronikos based in Pera and John V in Constantinople, which is presumably transposed from the period after Andronikos's overthrow, and having John V return to power at Andronikos's invitation after his escape from captivity. Doukas, *Istoria* (n. 41 above), 73.

64 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:67, 182–83 (nos. 7/19, 22/20); Barker, *Manuel II*, 32–33. One of these chronicles gives 1 July as the date of the coup, but the Venetian historian Chinazzo says that it occurred six days before the arrival of the Venetian fleet, on 14 July. Daniele da Chinazzo, *Cronica de la guerra da Veniciani a Zenovesi*, ed. V. Lazzarini (Venice, 1958), 215–16.

65 Chinazzo, *Cronica*, 215–16; Manuel II Palaiologos, *Funeral Oration*, 108 n. 27 (citing the chronicle of Caroldo). The Venetian chronicler Rafaino Caresini claims that Carlo Zeno's Venetian fleet was responsible for restoring John V, but this is evidently a constructive interpretation of events from the perspective of Venetian self-importance. The more thorough and generally reliable accounts of Chinazzo and Caroldo, in which Zeno arrived only after the coup, are clearly to be preferred. Rafaino Caresini, *Raphayni de Caresinis Cancellarii Venetiarum Chronica AA. 1343–1388*, ed. E. Pastorello, *RIS*, n.s. 12, no. 2 (Bologna, 1923), 36.

56 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:67, 96 (nos. 7/17, 9/32).

57 Ibid., 1:67 (no. 7/17); Kydones, *Correspondance*, 2:37–39 (no. 167). The size of the Ottoman contingent was put at four thousand cavalry by Chalkokondyles, who incorrectly identifies the Ottoman ruler in question as Murad's successor, Bayezid I. Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Laonici Chalcocandylae Historiarum Demonstrationes*, ed. J. Darkó, 2 vols. (Budapest, 1922–27), 1:55–57; J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1969), 27–28.

58 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:182 (no. 22/16).

59 Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrationes*, 1:56.

60 Gómez, *Byzance* (n. 6 above), 262–68; Ganchou, "Jean VII" (n. 8 above), 372–81; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 123–27, 131–37.

61 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:96 (no. 9/32).

62 Ibid., 1:67, 182 (nos. 7/17, 22/17); Barker, *Manuel II*, 28–29.

methods closely followed the pattern set by his father in 1376. He too openly laid siege to the city with the help of Ottoman forces, lent to him by the Sultan Bayezid I. On the night of 13 April, John VII was admitted to Constantinople by supporters inside, apparently from the lower orders of society, who opened the Gate of Charisios for him but insisted that only his Byzantine troops were to enter, excluding the Turks. He carried the city with minimal resistance and received military help from the Genoese of Pera, but for the next five months John V held out under siege at the Golden Gate while Manuel II escaped to seek help. After two failed attempts, in August Manuel arrived with a small seaborne force, including a contingent supplied by the Knights of St. John, and broke through the besiegers to join his father inside the fortress. On 17 September, Manuel led his forces on a sortie into the city, which overwhelmed John VII.⁶⁶

A similar pattern was followed by the last, unsuccessful coup attempt in the history of Byzantine Constantinople, staged more than half a century later by Demetrios Palaiologos. In April 1442, Demetrios and his Turkish allies laid siege to the city; meeting no success, they finally abandoned the attempt in August. Chalkokondyles reports that Demetrios was frustrated in his hopes for inside help from his brother-in-law and perennial ally Matthew Palaiologos Asan.⁶⁷

While the scanty information available on most of these later coups offers little additional insight into the mechanisms of penetrating Constantinople's defenses, it does extend and reinforce patterns visible in earlier events regarding the process of violence and negotiation

by which coups were brought to a conclusion after a successful incursion. In particular, it further highlights the importance of defensible refuges located on the city's perimeter, into which the leaders of the incumbent regime could withdraw when they lost their grip on the city. The coups of 1328, 1347, and 1354 all saw the Blachernai compound used in this way. The construction of the new fortress at the Golden Gate by John VI provided a more robust redoubt, employed in 1376 and 1390. For Andronikos IV in 1379, since he enjoyed the firm support of the Genoese, Pera offered a still more secure refuge and a base whose resources would enable him to continue a long armed struggle on the capital's doorstep. On that occasion too, the Golden Gate seemingly held out for the ousted emperor.

Continuing resistance in a stronghold within the city did not usually enable the incumbent regime to mount a military revival as in 1390, but this was repeatedly contemplated or attempted through the summoning of fresh forces, from Pera in 1347 and from Thrace in 1354. Given the modesty of the military resources at the disposal of Byzantine contenders, even a short stay of execution offered an opportunity to shift the balance of forces. The fact that both Blachernai and the Golden Gate were located on the walls and not far from the shore made them conduits through which reinforcements arriving by either land or sea could be admitted to the city, bypassing what were now enemy defenses, as in the case of Manuel's soldiers in 1390. While Anna of Savoy's reinforcements in 1347 were overcome militarily, in 1354 only John VI's preference for a compromise obviated the prospect of a fresh round of fighting, and the possibility of such a military response strengthened his negotiating position.

The role of the Golden Gate in reviving the old regime's fortunes in 1390 may well account for Bayezid's subsequent insistence that the fortress be destroyed.⁶⁸ It seems unlikely that its potential effect on any Ottoman attempt to seize the city directly would have been very daunting. Given that any defensive circuit is only as strong as its weakest point, the strengthening of a small section of the vast perimeter of Constantinople could not have made much difference to the prospects of an assault. Even the impact of its strength in freeing up men for use elsewhere must have been very limited.

66 Ignatios, "Journey" (n. 45 above), 100–103; Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:68–69 (no. 7/21–22); Barker, *Manuel II*, 71–78; S. W. Reinert, "The Palaiologoi, Yıldırım Bāyezīd and Constantinople: June 1389–March 1391," in Langdon et al., *To Ellēnikón* (n. 50 above), 289–365, reprinted in S. W. Reinert, *Late Byzantine and Ottoman Studies* (Farnham, UK, 2014), VI at 309–27; Charanis, "Βραχέα Χρονικά" (n. 55 above), 356–57; Kolias, "Ἀνταρσία" (n. 3 above), 36–64; J. W. Barker, "John VII in Genoa: A Problem in Late Byzantine Source Confusion," *OCP* 28 (1962): 213–38. According to one of the short chronicles, the forces brought by Manuel consisted of two galleys from the Knights of St. John on Rhodes and one each from Lemnos and Christoupolis, as well as his own galley from Constantinople and some smaller vessels.

67 George Sphrantzes, *Georgii Sphrantzae Chronicon*, ed. R. Maisano, CFHB 29 (Rome, 1990), 90; Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:216, 463 (nos. 29/11, 62/10); Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrationes* (n. 57 above), 2:80–81; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 279–80.

68 Doukas, *Istoria*, 77; Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:69 (no. 7/23); Barker, *Manuel II*, 467–68; Reinert, "Palaiologoi," 331–32.

The stronghold's role as a refuge and a point of access for counterattacks would surely have been of still less concern: the scale of the military resources available to the Ottomans would effectively preclude any Christian reconquest if the Turks could once get their forces into the city. However, the events of 1390 had illustrated the capacity of a refuge as strong as the Golden Gate to thwart an internal coup. Given the Ottomans' propensity to exploit Byzantine dynastic divisions by sponsoring one claimant to the throne against another, any obstruction to such changes of regime went against their interests by making it more difficult for them to install a preferred contender, and by reducing incumbents' sense of insecurity about such challenges and hence their susceptibility to Ottoman pressure.

The empire's vulnerability to foreign pressure reflected its weakened condition, which also rendered Constantinople more vulnerable than before to intrusion from the wider empire. The dwindling extent of its territories and the frequently insecure condition of its remaining lands in this period reduced the size of the empire's available tax base and hence the size of its armies.⁶⁹ Of course, this reduced not only the forces that the incumbent regime could maintain but also those of challengers, although these could be augmented by allied contingents. However, a reduction in scale across the board clearly tilted the balance in favor of an attacker seeking to enter the city through subterfuge or betrayal. Such methods were most likely to succeed if the attackers could surprise the defenders by an unexpected appearance on the scene, and the stealthy approach required to achieve such surprise was not feasible for a large army or fleet. John Kantakouzenos explicitly states that he restricted the size of his force in 1347 because of the likelihood that a larger number would be detected.⁷⁰ In 1261, 1328, 1347, and 1354, small forces approaching under cover of darkness were able to reach Constantinople in secrecy, and their arrival was detected only after they entered the city or on their final approach to the walls. It is true that despite the warning given by the overt appearance of an army before the walls, the incumbent regime was unable to thwart the machinations of sympathizers inside in 1376 and 1390,

but the thwarting of the coup attempt of 1353 by the special precautions taken after the attackers' approach was detected is suggestive of the benefits of secrecy, while in 1390 the regime was able to take special steps to forestall the opening of gates to the attackers, albeit without success.

A tactic that could be attempted only by a modest force could be effective only if the dedicated defenders of the city were similarly few in number. The great extent of the defensive circuit magnified the difficulty of providing adequate security along its whole length. Such problems presumably account for the tendency in this period for gates to be blocked by walls. With fewer defenders guarding the perimeter it was also harder to concentrate the forces needed to counterattack effectively against attackers who had already gained access to the city, especially if their appearance came by surprise. Given the size of Constantinople, penetrating the walls could not guarantee victory for attackers. This was illustrated by the precarious position of Alexios I Komnenos's pillaging soldiery in 1081 and by the crusaders' attack in 1203, when after storming the walls the attackers were threatened by a counterattack and were able to maintain their foothold only by setting fire to the city.⁷¹ Even in 1261, with the forces of the Latin Empire diminished by the Daphnusia expedition, Alexios Strategopoulos apparently considered abandoning the attack when he encountered resistance after entering the city, fearful that his small force would be overwhelmed by a counterattack.⁷² The threat of the fleet returning from Daphnusia was enough to induce him to make use of fire as well, this time as a psychological rather than physical attack.

The reduced population of Constantinople probably also underpinned the consistent success enjoyed by small forces that managed to enter the city. Though still very large for this period, the population was an order of magnitude smaller than it had been at its height, before 1204.⁷³ The city had fragmented into clusters of

69 Regarding the modest size of Byzantine armies in this period, see M. C. Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204–1453* (Philadelphia, 1992), 258–69.

70 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:605.

71 Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. E. Faral, 2 vols. (Paris, 1938–39), 1:178; Robert of Clari, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. J. Dufournet (Paris, 2004), 116; D. E. Queller and T. F. Madden, *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 2000), 124–25.

72 Pachymeres, *Relations* (n. 28 above), 1:197–99.

73 A. M. Schneider, "Die Bevölkerung Konstantinopels im XV. Jahrhundert," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse* 9 (1949): 233–44 at 237;

habitation within a perimeter containing more open than built-up ground.⁷⁴ This reduced density must have helped armed forces small enough to approach secretly to embolden sympathizers, sway waverers, and daunt opponents among the population, in a way that would not have been feasible when the population numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

While making a covert approach feasible and tilting the balance more generally in favor of incursions through betrayal or subterfuge, the reduction in scale does not seem to have been of help to other means of staging a coup. Surprisingly, it did not discernibly ease entry by storm, despite the length of the perimeter to be defended, as indicated by Constantinople's resilience to Ottoman attack as well as the lack of attested intrusions without inside help during coups. The sheer physical obstacle presented by the walls seems to have been formidable enough to enable even thinly spread defenders to hold the line or to deter direct assault altogether.

The reduction in scale may have actively diminished the capacity of an outside army to convince the incumbent regime to concede, or to underwrite violent action by supporters inside the city. Though conspirators in prior contact with an outside force continued to play a critical role, they no longer demonstrated the capacity to instigate an internal revolt when a challenger's army approached, perhaps because the available armies had a less persuasive effect on the mood of the city by their mere appearance. Arguably, the presence of a few thousand soldiers should have had the same psychological impact on tens of thousands of inhabitants as tens of thousands of attackers could have on hundreds of thousands within.⁷⁵ However, in reality this

may not have been the case, if the emotional impression generated by a mass of men rested more on absolute numbers than on relative ones. Conversely, in the centuries after 1204 government soldiers within the walls, facing the population at close quarters, were apparently able to overawe them on occasion. The Orthodox inhabitants had remained quiescent when Latin Constantinople was besieged by Nicaean and Bulgarian forces in 1235–36, as well as during Michael VIII's siege of Pera in 1260.⁷⁶ When John V made his first attempt on the capital in 1353, he failed despite his widespread popular support in Constantinople because Empress Irene, in command in the absence of John VI, deployed trusted forces to keep a close guard on all entrances, to arrest the young emperor's leading sympathizers, and to intimidate the populace at large, stifling any potential unrest.⁷⁷ As discussed below, Andronikos II also used the threat of his soldiers as part of his successful efforts to quell dangerous unrest in the city during the crisis of 1305.⁷⁸

A Palaiologan pretender was more likely to be able to assemble an army large enough to have a powerful psychological effect by its mere presence before the walls if backed by foreign forces. Yet when such support was present, any appeal to inside help was bound to be undermined by reliance on foreigners, the more so when the allies in question were the Ottomans, the empire's most threatening enemy. Besides diminishing sympathy for a contender who appeared as the puppet of a hostile power, to admit such a force to the city was to take a fearful risk that the interlopers would simply set their pawn aside and take control for themselves. It has been argued that a constituency existed in Constantinople who not only preferred the risk of Turkish conquest to religious concessions to the Latins but actively favored a Turkish takeover and colluded with the Ottomans to bring this about.⁷⁹ However, it is conspicuous that although the Ottomans besieged Constantinople on their own account on four occasions—including

E. Francès, "Constantinople byzantine aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles. Population, commerce, métiers," *RESEE* 7, no. 2 (1969): 405–12 at 405–8.

74 Bertrand de la Brocquiere, *Le Voyage d'Outremer de Bertrand de la Brocquiere*, ed. C. H. A. Schefer (Paris, 1892), 153; Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *Christoph. Bondelmontii, Florentini, Librum Insularum Archipelagi*, ed. G. R. L. de Sinner (Leipzig and Berlin, 1824), 121, 124; Pero Tafur, *Andanças e Viajes de Pero Tafur por Diversas Partes del Mundo Avidos (1435–1439)*, ed. J. M. Ramos (Madrid, 1934), 114, 130, 137–38; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 194–96.

75 The importance of the psychological impact of a large army on the behavior of those in the city is reflected in Andronikos I's reported use of the traditional ploy of lighting extra watch fires to give an exaggerated impression of his army's numbers when encamped opposite Constantinople. Choniates, *Historia* (n. 2 above), 246; Cheynet, *Pouvoir* (n. 1 above), 111–12 (no. 150).

76 J. S. Langdon, "The Forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian Assault and Siege of Constantinople, 1235–1236, and the Breakup of the *entente cordiale* between John III Ducas Vatatzes and John Asen II in 1236 as Background to the Genesis of the Hohenstaufen-Vatatzes Alliance of 1242," *ByzMetabyz* 4 (1985): 105–33.

77 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum* (n. 36 above), 3:255–56; Gregoras, *Historia* (n. 30 above), 3:186–87.

78 Pachymeres, *Relations* (n. 28 above), 4:595–99.

79 Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 142–48, 180–82.

the long, grueling blockade of 1394–1402—no act of treachery ever admitted them to the city, in contrast to the frequency with which Byzantine pretenders were able to gain access by such means. This suggests that in general the inhabitants remained firmly hostile to the idea of letting in the Turks. This sentiment is obviously reflected in the refusal of John VII's supporters in the city to allow his Turks in. The apparently leading role of the Genoese in the fighting that followed Andronikos IV's entry into the city in 1376, despite the prominence of Turks among his forces before the city, suggests that something similar may have happened on that occasion.⁸⁰ According to Doukas, during the long siege of the 1390s Bayezid espoused John VII's cause as a pretext to gain entry to Constantinople, and the young emperor accompanied his army before the walls, but although a faction in the city favored placing John on the throne in order to end the war he was not admitted to the city.⁸¹ The other pretender known to have brought a Turkish force to Constantinople, the despot Demetrios, failed to gain admission. If the limited number of hard-core partisans required to secure a gate from within could be severely perturbed by a strong Turkish presence, the wider enthusiasm required to produce an uprising in support of a challenger would have been much harder to muster. It is notable in this context that the two pretenders in earlier centuries who had arrived outside the city backed by a foreign army, Justinian II with the Bulgarians in 705 and Alexios IV Angelos with the Fourth Crusade in 1203, had also both failed to elicit a favorable response from within the walls.⁸² Thus even substantial foreign forces seem to have been as ineffective as small Byzantine ones in triggering the kind of internal revolt that the appearance of large Byzantine armies had often precipitated in earlier times.

The inhabitants of Constantinople were not wholly inactive in the face of such coup attempts. Once an intruding armed force had actually gained access to the city, its presence could trigger popular action to

help oust the incumbent, as in 1354, or to resist counter-attacks, as in 1347. Among the three Palaiologan coups described in detail by the sources and the analogous events of the reconquest of 1261, only in 1328 is there no report of civilians taking up arms in support of the intruders, and on that occasion the swift defection of the regime's soldiers obviated any sustained resistance. However, a rising in support of a military incursion already within the walls must have demanded less enthusiasm and commitment than starting a revolt within the city, which would at least initially require the inhabitants to take on government troops alone.

On the other side of the equation, the general population never seems to have shown much zeal for resisting the intruding forces of a challenger in defense of the incumbent regime, with the possible exception of the three days of fighting reported during Andronikos IV's coup in 1376.⁸³ In some cases this can be related to the incumbent's unpopularity, but it is notable in the case of John VI's coup in 1347. In the light of the widespread hostility toward the challenger among the lower and middling orders of urban populations across the empire, Anna of Savoy's active effort to stir up the inhabitants against him, her expectation of their support, and the fact that the commercial classes of Constantinople remained antagonistic and uncooperative toward him after he seized power, some action in defense of the incumbent regime might have been expected.⁸⁴ Yet the only reported interventions and demonstrations of support by the populace were in John VI's favor, though it should be noted that these are mentioned only in his own account. Failure to oppose the intruding army of a challenger, however, presents less of a contrast with earlier periods than the lack of uprisings against an incumbent, since there is similarly little trace of popular resistance to the intruders of earlier coups, nor even to the foreign invaders of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, to their considerable surprise and relief.⁸⁵

80 Barker, *Manuel II* (n. 57 above), 28 n. 65.

81 Doukas, *Istoria*, 83.

82 Theophanes, *Chronographia* (n. 10 above), 1:374; Villehardouin, *La Conquête*, 1:146–48; Clari, *La Conquête*, 108; Queller and Madden, *Fourth Crusade* (n. 71 above), 113–14. Justinian took care to bring only his native supporters with him into the city, leaving the Bulgarians outside.

83 Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken* (n. 40 above), 1:96 (no. 9/32).

84 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:33–41. The prospect of popular opposition is also suggested by Kantakouzenos's remark that he had been afraid that if caught in the act of breaking open the Golden Gate his allies within the city might be killed by the populace (δῆμος). Ibid., 3:605.

85 Choniates, *Historia*, 572; Villehardouin, *La Conquête*, 2:46–52; Clari, *La Conquête*, 166–68.

The defense of John VI's regime in its dying days relied heavily on aristocratic and foreign elements. At the time of John V's abortive enterprise in 1353, the relatives and friends of the Kantakouzenoi (συγγενῶν καὶ φίλων) are said to have been pivotal in Irene's security measures. The following year, a considerable number of Byzantine aristocrats (τῶν εὐγενεστέρων οὐκ ὀλίγων) held out in the palace precinct with John VI, and he claims to have dissuaded them from striking back.⁸⁶ Foreign groups tended to show the greatest persistence in the defense of an incumbent regime, even exceeding that of its own leaders. This level of commitment reflects the deep entanglement of Byzantium's internal conflicts with the competing interests of the Latin mercantile communities. The most belligerent adherents of John VI in 1354 were his Catalan mercenaries, members of a group with particular reason to oppose the seizure of power by the Genoese-backed John V at a time when these persistently antagonistic communities were at war with each other. Not only did the Genoese of Pera fight to restore the fortunes of Anna of Savoy in 1347 and Andronikos IV in 1379 but on the latter occasion Genoese forces continued to resist the now Venetian-aligned John V at the Golden Gate even after Andronikos had fled across the Golden Horn.

Given such tendencies, the paucity of risings in the city in the absence of intruding forces might be attributed in part to a wider decline in the political activism of the capital's general population, but it is hard to find direct evidence for such a hypothesis.⁸⁷ Though it did not generate active bids to overthrow an emperor in this period, popular political opposition in the capital could evidently still become threatening at times. Specifically, the first decade of the fourteenth century saw considerable unrest in Constantinople and its vicinity, arising from an accumulation of problems: the collapse of the

Byzantine position in Anatolia, the consequent flight to Europe of large numbers of refugees from a region where the Palaiologoi were unpopular, the devastation of Thrace by the Catalan Grand Company and the resulting fresh influx of refugees, and the increased tax burden imposed to help deal with these troubles.⁸⁸ The special circumstances at work make it unsafe to draw general conclusions from the particular turbulence of these years. However, there is some indication that popular unrest directed against the ruling classes was a feature of Constantinopolitan life in the early fifteenth century.⁸⁹

A pronounced shift toward quiescence would also seem incongruous with developments elsewhere in the empire. Whatever their much-debated significance, the widespread anti-Kantakouzenist risings in the towns of Thrace and Macedonia and the emergence of the Zealot regime in Thessalonike in the 1340s were hardly suggestive of a new political passivity in the empire's urban populations.⁹⁰ Byzantium's second city repeatedly generated violent unrest on other occasions in this period, at times in connection with dynastic strife.⁹¹ It would be distinctly paradoxical if, just as the hitherto less

86 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:255, 286–88, 292–93.

87 On the role of the Constantinopolitan population in earlier periods, see Garland, "Political Power" (n. 1 above); Kaldellis, "How to Usurp" (n. 1 above); idem, *Byzantine Republic*, 89–164. It has been observed that the people of Constantinople, having been a formidable force in the politics of the eleventh century, had receded from the political scene for much of the Komnenian era, but that lapse into passivity occurred during a period of stability and effective political management, and ended with it. This hardly suggests a parallel with the troubled conditions of the Palaiologan era. M. Angold, "The Road to 1204: The Byzantine Background to the Fourth Crusade," *JMedHist* 25 (1999): 257–78 at 276–77; Cheynet, *Pouvoir* (n. 1 above), 202–5.

88 Laiou, *Constantinople* (n. 4 above), 122, 164–65, 190–99, 217–18.

89 John Chortasmenos, *Johannes Chortasmenos* (ca. 1370–ca. 1436/37): *Briefe, Gedichte und Kleine Schriften Einleitung, Regesten, Prosopographie, Text*, ed. H. Hunger (Vienna, 1969), 207–8 (no. 51); Bryennios, *Ἰωσήφ μοναχοῦ* (n. 51 above), 179–80 (no. 24); Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 196–97.

90 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 2:175–81, 227, 233–41, 355–57, 393–94, 568–82, 3:104–5, 108–10, 117–18; Gregoras, *Historia* (n. 30 above), 2:620–62, 632–35, 673–77, 740–41, 795–96; Nicol, *Last Centuries* (n. 4 above), 193–95; J. W. Barker, "Late Byzantine Thessalonike: A Second City's Challenges and Responses," *DOP* 57 (2003): 5–33 at 16–21, 29–33; K.-P. Matschke, "Thessalonike und die Zeloten: Bemerkungen zu einem Schlüsselereignis der spätbyzantinischen Stadt- und Reichsgeschichte," *BSI* 55 (1994): 19–43; M.-H. Congourdeau, ed., *Thessalonique au temps des Zélotes (1342–1350): Actes de la table ronde organisée dans le cadre du 22^e Congrès international des études byzantines, à Sofia le 25 août 2011* (Paris, 2014); M.-H. Congourdeau, *Les Zélotes: Une révolte urbaine à Thessalonique au 14^{ème} siècle; Le dossier des sources* (Paris, 2013).

91 The inhabitants of Thessalonike had revolted against the despot Constantine, governor for his father Andronikos II, in favor of his nephew Andronikos III. The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries saw further stirrings of violent popular unrest in the city, though these were driven by the special pressures of Turkish siege. Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:356–57; Symeon of Thessalonike, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, ed. D. Balfour (Vienna, 1979), 46–49, 55–77 (nos. 4, 8), 122–23, 157–66; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 47–48, 71–73, 76–77.

politically active people of the provincial towns were showing an increased propensity to raise revolt in the streets, the inhabitants of Constantinople were to have turned from their long history of setting up and pulling down emperors to an unprecedented apathy.

Views on the wider political role of the people of Constantinople in this period are mixed. A number of scholars have argued that there was a particularly high level of engagement between the imperial government and the inhabitants of the capital in the empire's last decades, as the imperial authorities shifted to a more consultative approach to government, perhaps driven in part by the increasing heft of metropolitan mercantile groups in the diminished empire.⁹² A contrasting view is that in the empire's last centuries the emperor and court substantially disengaged from the city, withdrawing into seclusion in the peripheral Blachernai compound and largely ceasing to involve the metropolitan population in ceremonies or interact with them through transitional spaces such as the Hippodrome.⁹³ The likely impact of either putative trend on political violence is also debatable. Increased involvement in decision-making could have encouraged the political assertiveness of the people and hence reinforced their traditional readiness to depose unsatisfactory rulers. On the other hand, it might have reduced the appeal of revolt in the capital by offering the populace a greater ability to influence imperial policy without taking such drastic action, or at least the plausible appearance of it. The possible significance of a decline in ritual mechanisms for the affirmation by the people of their endorsement of the emperor and by the emperor of his responsiveness to the people is similarly ambiguous.⁹⁴

92 T. Kioussopoulou, *Emperor or Manager: Power and Political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453*, trans. P. Magdalino (Geneva, 2011), 111–27; N. Oikonomides, *Hommes d'affaires grecs et latins à Constantinople (XIII^e–XV^e siècles)* (Paris, 1979), 116–20; D. Kyritses, “The Imperial Council and the Tradition of Consultative Decision-Making in Byzantium (Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries),” in Angelov and Saxby, *Power and Subversion* (n. 1 above), 57–69 at 63–69.

93 P. Magdalino, “Court and Capital in Byzantium,” in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. J. Duindam, T. Artan, and M. Kunt (Leiden and Boston, 2011), 131–44. The significance of these shifts has however been contested: R. Macrides, “Ceremonies and the City: The Court in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople,” in *ibid.*, 217–35.

94 On the importance of such affirmations, see Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, 139–48.

It could have systematically undermined the legitimacy of imperial rule in the eyes of the people, though the endurance of the Palaiologan dynasty suggests that the practical effect of any such tendency was negligible. Conversely, a readiness on the part of successive emperors to dispense with these forms of engagement could imply that they could now afford to do without them, suggesting a reduced sense of dependence on the endorsement of the city. This would chime with a reduced tendency for the populace to take the lead in overthrowing emperors.

While external intrusion became the invariable method of successful Constantinopolitan coups after 1261, plots to instigate changes of regime by other means did not disappear. These schemes seldom if ever reached the point of concrete action before being exposed and the conspirators arrested, and given this abortive character and limited attention from the sources there is little evidence of the mechanisms intended. Nonetheless, it is clear that in the majority of cases the primary seat of the intended action of such failed conspiracies was within the court or the city, although the participation of armed forces from outside the walls was also envisaged on occasion. The predominantly foreign character of these forces prefigured the increased involvement of foreign backers in later successful coups.

The febrile atmosphere of the disastrous early years of the fourteenth century raised the prospect of serious upheaval. In 1305 popular unrest focused on the demand for a fleet to be built to oppose the Catalans induced Andronikos II to bring soldiers into the city to discourage revolt, to make a personal address to the leading inhabitants, and to compel the whole population to take an oath of loyalty.⁹⁵ That year the cleric John Drimys, who claimed descent from the Laskarid dynasty in order to appeal to its enduring popularity in Anatolia and among the Arsenite ecclesiastical faction, conspired to seize power in Constantinople. He won support among the lower orders and asked the Catalans for assistance, but was thwarted; he and his leading supporters were imprisoned or expelled from the capital.⁹⁶ Letters written to Charles of Valois in

95 Pachymeres, *Relations* (n. 28 above), 4:595–99.

96 Pachymeres, *Relations*, 4:653; Athanasios I, *The Correspondence of Athanasios I, Patriarch of Constantinople: Letters to the Emperor Andronicus II, Members of the Imperial Family, and Officials*, ed. A.-M. Talbot, CFHB 7 (Washington, DC, 1975), 202–10 (no. 81);

1307–10 by Byzantine malcontents of Anatolian origin pledging support for his intended restoration of the Latin Empire offer little indication of the means by which they hoped to secure Constantinople, though they certainly envisaged the active participation of a Latin army as well as that of their fellow Anatolians. One conspirator's allusion to the prospective assistance of many sympathetic Anatolians present outside the capital suggests that he had an armed entry into the city in mind rather than an uprising within the walls, perhaps reflecting the success of Andronikos II's efforts to expel potential insurgents.⁹⁷

The mid-fourteenth century saw a number of alleged conspiracies to carry out coups by one means or another. In 1335, while Andronikos III and John Kantakouzenos were absent on a campaign to counter the attempted seizure of Lesbos by Domenico Cattaneo della Volta, the Genoese lord of Phokaia, a number of young aristocrats in Constantinople, including Kantakouzenos's brothers-in-law John and Manuel Asan, were accused of plotting to seize power with the support of the Genoese of Pera and of a squadron of galleys from Genoa that happened to be in the area. They reportedly planned to kill Anna of Savoy and the infant John V but were detected by John Kantakouzenos's mother, Theodora Palaiologina Kantakouzene, and arrested.⁹⁸ Their reasons for undertaking such a scheme and the exact methods proposed are not specified.

Alexios Apokaukos was accused of repeated plots to seize greater power under the unsettled conditions of the minority of John V and the resulting civil war. His hostile treatment by the sources, however, invites a degree of skepticism about supposed schemes never proven by practice. According to Kantakouzenos, in 1341 before the outbreak of the civil war Apokaukos planned to spirit the young emperor away by galley to his own stronghold at Epibatai and hold him hostage there, demanding control of government, but he was exposed and fled to Epibatai empty-handed.⁹⁹ Gregoras

and a short chronicle mention his flight to Epibatai as a result of failed political machinations but do not specify their nature.¹⁰⁰ Kantakouzenos also alleges that in 1345, Apokaukos was plotting to incite a popular uprising in Constantinople to kill Anna of Savoy and John V and to seize unrestricted power for himself, but that this scheme was forestalled by his sudden death.¹⁰¹ Gregoras reports a less dramatic scheme around this time, in which Apokaukos was considering the possibility of seizing John V while on board a ship, taking him to Epibatai, and marrying the young emperor to his own daughter.¹⁰²

Another plot, reminiscent of that of 1335, occurred in 1357, while John V was absent on campaign against John Kalothetos of Old Phokaia. An adherent of the Kantakouzenoi named Ziani planned a palace coup to take Empress Helena and her children hostage and thus secure the release of the captive Matthew Kantakouzenos and his restoration to a Thracian appanage, but he was exposed by Matthew's mother, Irene, after approaching her for support.¹⁰³

The failure of these schemes to come to fruition clearly owed much to chance. Such conspiracies had a high failure rate throughout Byzantine history. Their tendency to early termination obstructs any assessment of how realistic their prospects of success would have been if brought to the point of action. However, the contrast between the consistent failure of such plots even to reach that point and the frequent success of coups by military intrusion is unlikely to be accidental. The lack of evidence for further plots of this kind after the mid-fourteenth century may well owe much to the sharply diminished availability of narrative sources after that date, but it may also be connected with wider political developments. Contention for the highest office had become restricted to a narrow circle of close relatives, who were now frequently granted wide-ranging authority in the provinces, placing them in positions of power away from the capital and accompanied by their own retinues. These changes reinforced the prevalence of the coup by intrusion into

A. Failler, "Le complot antidynastique de Jean Drimys," *REB* 54 (1996): 235–44.

97 Laiou, *Constantinople* (n. 4 above), 212–20.

98 Gregoras, *Historia*, 1:530–33; Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 1:481–82, 484.

99 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 2:70–71. Apokaukos was rehabilitated shortly afterward, and he took a leading role in the events that followed.

100 Gregoras, *Historia*, 2:599; Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 1:81 (no. 8/34).

101 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 2:540–41.

102 Gregoras, *Historia*, 2:702.

103 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:341–45.

Constantinople, and help account for the much higher success rate for such endeavors.

One of the prevailing shifts in Byzantine politics in the Palaiologan period was the continued narrowing of the circle from which prospective emperors might be drawn to the point of a near-hereditary monopoly of one family, the final belated triumph of the dynastic principle after almost one-and-a-half millennia of Roman monarchy. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, challenges to the Palaiologoi continued, largely emanating from Anatolian and Arsenite elements that had never fully accepted the new ruling family.¹⁰⁴ These intransigent groups faded from the scene after the early fourteenth century. The last significant rupture in the emerging Palaiologan monopoly came with John VI Kantakouzenos, head of the leading family of the Byzantine aristocracy and, as Andronikos III's chief minister, the preponderant political figure in the empire for over a decade before his proclamation as emperor. Even in his case, the launching of his bid for the throne in 1341 was apparently to some extent a reactive move, undertaken after his rivals in the regency government moved against him.¹⁰⁵ In victory he remained reluctant to challenge the future Palaiologan succession, still less to depose John V, though his son Matthew Kantakouzenos displayed greater dynastic ambitions, which he finally surrendered in 1357.¹⁰⁶ After the challenge of the Kantakouzenoi was brought to an end, the Palaiologoi continued to reign uncontested for almost a century until the fall of Constantinople.¹⁰⁷

This tightening association between the imperial office and a single dynasty is all the more striking and significant given the swift decline of the empire over which the Palaiologoi presided, their humiliation as

tributaries of the Ottomans, and the hostility aroused by the repeated embrace of religious compromise with the Latin West by members of the dynasty. Given the frequency with which violent changes of regime were attempted and accomplished, the endurance and entrenchment of the dynasty cannot be explained in terms of effective political management by reigning emperors or of some collective impulse to maintain a united front against outside threats. Yet the most radical solution to the empire's severe troubles that dissidents in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were apparently prepared to pursue was the replacement of an emperor with his brother, son, or nephew. To some degree this must be connected with the sheer inertia of a long-reigning dynasty and the patina of legitimacy it acquired over time, an effect also observable in earlier times in the case of the Macedonian dynasty. The failure of outside challengers to emerge may also be related to the chronic internal strife of the Palaiologoi. This frequently provided the discontented with prospective leaders drawn from within the dynasty, who were often willing to espouse policies on contentious issues that were opposed to those of the senior emperor.

This shift toward a dynastic monopoly intersected with another aspect of the continuing encroachment of the family principle in Byzantine politics: the emergence of "appanage" territories. Prefigured by the short-lived division of the empire between Andronikos II and Andronikos III, the assignment of portions of the empire's territory to members of the imperial family became a widespread trend in Byzantine government after John VI's seizure of the capital. This meant that they increasingly resided outside the capital—attended by an entourage of their own—in Thessalonike, Adrianople, Selymbria, Mistra, or whatever other place became the seat of their local regime. Some of those empowered in this way were coemperors, while others, typically holding the rank of despot, exercised powers and prerogatives of a kind traditionally reserved to an emperor ruling from Constantinople and markedly exceeding those of provincial governors. Consequently, much more of the direction of policy and distribution of patronage was now conducted away from the capital.¹⁰⁸

104 Laiou, *Constantinople*, 79–84, 87–89, 197–98, 214–20.

105 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 2:11–173; Gregoras, *Historia*, 2:576–616; D. M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460; A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington, DC, 1968), 35–63.

106 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:340–58; MM 1:448–50 (no. 194); Nicol, *Byzantine Family*, 109–18.

107 Matthew Kantakouzenos's own son in the 1380s made a last brief bid for princely power on a local level by raising revolt against the despot Theodore I Palaiologos's appointment to succeed the Kantakouzenoi in the Morea. Palaiologos, *Funeral Oration* (n. 55 above), 115–19; Nicol, *Byzantine Family*, 157–59; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 235–38.

108 These included the granting of lands and privileges, the appointment of provincial governors, and the conduct of foreign policy and diplomatic relations. Sphrantzes, *Chronicon* (n. 67 above), 92, 96–98; S. Lampros, *Παλαιολόγεια και Πελοποννησιακά*,

Besides offering hope of slaking the ambitions of competing princes, the distribution of imperial relatives around the empire may, like their very fractiousness, have helped undercut the inclination of the discontented to look elsewhere for leadership attentive to their concerns, as the Anatolians had done in the thirteenth century. The shift to on-the-spot familial government manifested in the appanage modified the shape of political society in ways that diluted the centrality of the capital, affecting its role in political conflict. Those entrusted with appanages required servitors of suitable standing to assist in their administration, while their authority to confer office, properties, and privileges within their territory made their residences an attractive focus of patronage of a sort formerly available only in Constantinople. The scope for princes governing portions of the empire to pursue their own lines of policy, distinct from and potentially in contradiction of those of the emperor in Constantinople, also rendered them poles of attraction for like-minded political dissenters. Rather than a single, fixed Constantinopolitan court forming the exclusive hub of aristocratic life across the empire, there were now multiple courts centered on individuals, which followed them as they shifted from place to place. Thus, for example, the adherents of John VII can be seen moving with him from Selymbria to Constantinople and back, to Constantinople again, and finally to Thessalonike.¹⁰⁹

This shift should not be overstated. Clearly, such provincial courts would not actually have emptied the imperial capital of important supporters of potential contenders. The fact that John VII's siege prompted John V to have nearly fifty individuals suspected of collusion with the young emperor mutilated by blinding or nose-slitting implies the continued presence of

a considerable number of prominent associates in the city.¹¹⁰ Even this action did not eliminate the supporters, apparently of humble origin, who ultimately admitted him. Andronikos III in 1328 had similarly been able to find accomplices within the walls while heading a regime based elsewhere. The degree to which the appanage territorialized factionalism did not deprive Constantinople of its enduring status as the prime focus for elite life and political dispute in Byzantium. Nonetheless, the dispersal of members of the dynasty and their adherents would at least have thinned the ranks of potential ringleaders for an urban insurrection or actors in a palace coup.

The habitual absence of eligible contenders would have sharply diminished the scope for coups confined to the capital in the absence of further challenges from outside the ruling dynasty. Whether inside the walls or nearby with an army, would-be emperors had always needed to be on the scene to instigate the overthrow of an emperor or benefit from a spontaneous uprising. The rarity of adult imperial princes living at liberty in Constantinople rendered an advance in force from outside increasingly necessary when attempting a change of regime. At the same time, their absence from the capital, possession of territorial authority and an armed following elsewhere, and their own high status shielded the prospective contenders from sudden exposure and perfunctory arrest, which persistently negated the efforts of conspirators plotting to launch a coup within Constantinople in the Palaiologan period, as it often had in earlier times. This relative inaccessibility to the coercive reach of the incumbent regime in the capital does much to explain the fact that all successful coups of the era were launched from outside the imperial city.

The dwindling of the empire, the rise of the family principle, and the more distributed governmental structure reflected in the appanage also contributed to another distinctive quality of the Palaiologan coup: the physical and political survivability of being either the target of a successful coup or the protagonist of a failed one. This shift meant that violent events in the capital transformed the empire's government less: no longer as comprehensive or conclusive as in former times, the verdict of conflict became increasingly nuanced and provisional.

4 vols. (Athens, 1912–30), 4:15–22, 29–30, 104–9, 187–95, 231–35; MM 3:173–76, 205–7, 225–27, 230–34 (nos. 37–38, 43, 46, 48–49), 5:170–75 (nos. 6–8); J. Chrysostomides, *Monumenta Peloponnesiaca: Documents for the History of the Peloponnese in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Camberley, 1995), 47, 87–88, 96, 107–9, 111–13, 120–21, 140–41, 204–10, 252–54, 269–75, 283–85, 301–3, 361–63, 378, 382–88, 415–16, 437–38, 470–71, 487, 499–502, 504–5, 515–20, 523–24, 527–30, 535–36, 539–41, 544, 592 (nos. 22, 38–39, 44, 49, 51, 57–58, 68, 103–5, 130–31, 141, 145, 153, 180–81, 189, 192–93, 213, 223, 232–33, 244, 255–57, 259, 269–71, 274, 277–78, 283, 285, 287, 319); L. Maksimović, *The Byzantine Provincial Administration under the Palaiologoi* (Amsterdam, 1988), 135, 160–65, 199 n. 64, 244, 263; Zakythinos, *Despotat* (n. 9 above), 116–24.

109 Ganchou, “Jean VII” (n. 8 above), 369–71.

110 Ignatios, “Journey” (n. 45 above), 100–101.

Byzantine political culture had long offered a range of sanctions that could be taken against deposed emperors or thwarted pretenders who fell into the hands of their enemies, ranging in severity from death to mutilation, imprisonment, exile, and tonsure. In the Palaiologan era, serious violence was not usually inflicted on defeated leaders. The 1258 coup in Nicaea that installed the Palaiologoi on the throne amounted to the end of an era, marked as it was by Michael VIII Palaiologos's blinding of the young John IV Laskaris and the murder of the regent George Mouzalon and his brothers.¹¹¹ After the Palaiologoi came to power, none of the contending princes were killed as a result of the chronic political violence of the era. Mutilation was employed against them on only one occasion: the ineffective blinding of Andronikos IV and John VII after the former's revolt in 1373. Even this was unwillingly undertaken by John V at the insistence of Murad I, who inflicted the same punishment on his own son Savci Beg, who was Andronikos's accomplice.¹¹² This was a forcible imposition of the methods of the lethal dynastic politics of the Ottomans on the squabbles of the Palaiologoi, overriding their usually more restrained practices. This contrast, and the strength of the Palaiologan norms, is ostensibly underlined by Chalkokondyles's claim that Murad instructed Andronikos to have John V and Manuel II killed after his coup of 1376 but that Andronikos refused, although the reliability of this story is uncertain.¹¹³ John V had previously rebuffed an offer to have his rival and brother-in-law Matthew Kantakouzenos blinded by the Serbs who had captured him in 1356.¹¹⁴

111 Pachymeres, *Relations* (n. 28 above), 1:81–89; Akropolites, *Opera* (n. 29 above), 1:155; M. Avgerinou-Tzioga, "The Murder of the Mouzalon Brothers in Byzantine Historiography," in *Realia Byzantina*, ed. S. Kotzabassi and G. Mavromatis, *ByzArch* 22 (Berlin and New York, 2009), 13–16.

112 Doukas, *Istoria* (n. 41 above), 71–73; Caresini, *Chronica* (n. 65 above), 32; Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrationes* (n. 57 above), 1:36–39, 41–42, 55; Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken* (n. 40 above), 1:110, 182 (nos. 12/1, 22/14); Charanis, "Strife" (n. 3 above), 293–95; Dennis, *Manuel II*, 26–27.

113 Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrationes*, 1:57. Besides the general unreliability of Chalkokondyles's coverage of events at such an early date, this account sits oddly with the advantages for the Ottomans of keeping multiple Byzantine contenders available so that they could be played against one another as convenient, a point highlighted by the fact that in 1379 Murad took advantage of John and Manuel's survival by switching his support to them.

114 Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum* (n. 36 above), 3:332, 336.

By restricting political contention at this level to a handful of close relatives, the triumph of the family principle must have acted as a restraining influence on violence against defeated contenders through personal sentiment and social propriety. Close family ties had not invariably barred brutal physical sanctions in the past, as attested by Alexios III Angelos's blinding of his brother Isaac II or the similar treatment inflicted by Irene on her son Constantine VI.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, they must have played a significant part in the fading away of violence against fallen emperors and failed challengers. Increased reliance on a small number of relatives to provide the empire's political leadership may have also boosted the importance of keeping such individuals available rather than depriving the empire of their services, an unavoidable by-product of the more permanent means of eliminating them from political contention.

The dwindling consequences of defeat were not limited to physical violence but also extended to prospects for the continuation of normal life and perhaps of a political career. The principal nonviolent means of disqualifying individuals from imperial office, relegating them to the monastic life, was employed in the cases of Andronikos II and John VI but not in those of other prospective candidates like Matthew Kantakouzenos in 1357, John V and Manuel in 1376, or Demetrios Palaiologos, who was arrested and imprisoned not long after the failure of his bid for power in 1442.¹¹⁶ In these cases, the distinctly unreliable restraint of imprisonment was the furthest the victors went in seeking to guard themselves against future challenges, and even this might have been only an interim measure. The defeated Kantakouzenoi were not removed from the political scene after 1354, as the monk Ioasaph, the former Emperor John VI, continued to wield influence from the cloister, while his son Manuel remained administrator of the Morea.¹¹⁷ Even when Matthew Kantakouzenos, John V's deadliest rival, fell entirely into the latter's power, he was only briefly imprisoned

115 Choniates, *Historia* (n. 2 above), 452; Symeon the Logothete, *Chronicon* (n. 10 above), 1:472.

116 Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrationes*, 2:81.

117 D. M. Nicol, *The Reluctant Emperor: A Biography of John Cantacuzene, Byzantine Emperor and Monk, c. 1295–1383* (Cambridge, 1996), 134–60; idem, *Byzantine Family* (n. 106 above), 86–96, 116–18, 123–28; Zakythinos, *Despotat* (n. 9 above), 1:95–113.

before being reconciled to the Palaiologan regime and allowed to settle in his brother Manuel's province.¹¹⁸ John was apparently encouraged to seek this rapprochement by the Ziani conspiracy, which highlighted the dangers that even a captive rival could generate and the consequent advantages of rehabilitating those whom an emperor was unwilling to eliminate permanently.

Besides the improved prospects for those whose fate was at their enemies' discretion, the changing practicalities of coups helped the vanquished to retain the liberty and bargaining power that would enable them to negotiate a compromise settlement. The capacity of defeated contenders to secure a congenial future had always rested heavily on their ability to negotiate with their enemies from a secure position, rather than falling into their power.¹¹⁹ For those who lost control of the city, the availability of fortified refuges in Constantinople provided a breathing space for negotiation or even for revival, while long-term safety could be gained by fleeing to foreign territories that were now scarcely farther away. The development of Pera into a fortified foreign port just across the Golden Horn offered an extremely convenient refuge and base of operations for those favored by the Genoese, while the establishment of Ottoman control of the eastern shore of the Bosphoros provided another possibility. The ease of flight from the capital straight into foreign territory was of use not only in the moment of a coup, as in the case of Andronikos IV in 1379, but also for those who had been imprisoned in Constantinople after defeat but who managed to escape their confinement. This can be seen in the cases of Andronikos IV in his previous escape to Pera in 1376; of John V and Manuel II, who slipped across the Bosphoros to Ottoman Scutari in 1379; and of Demetrios Palaiologos, who in the 1440s was able to get away to Pera.¹²⁰

Once out of easy reach, princes could launch a new bid for the throne or trade in the threat of such hostile action to secure a negotiated settlement. The triumph of the family principle in government strengthened their hand. The growing expectation that adult male members of an imperial dynasty would take a

share in government reinforced the menace they posed as long as they remained unreconciled to the present regime. That menace was further enhanced by the increased role played in the empire's internal struggles by foreign powers, most significantly the Ottomans. The constant threat that a disgruntled relative could be played against a reigning emperor if ever he displeased one of his powerful neighbors was a forceful motivation to seek peace among the empire's princes, even at heavy cost. Such defensive logic is apparent in Manuel II's reconciliation with John VII on the eve of his own departure to western Europe in 1399. He could not leave his unappeased nephew to make mischief in his absence, and even turning over the beleaguered capital to John for the duration was a price worth paying.¹²¹

The tendency toward administration through a distributed family group ensured that violent contention for power at the highest level was no longer an all-or-nothing affair focused exclusively on possession of Constantinople and its integrated governmental apparatus. Princes heading their own administration in neighboring areas could engage in more limited and usually inconclusive conflicts over territory. This phenomenon became a recurrent problem in the fifteenth-century Morea, where the rivalries between Palaiologan princes were enmeshed with the local aristocrats' perennial struggles over resources with their despots and one another.¹²² The prevailing form of the Constantinopolitan coup to some degree harmonized with these new manifestations of political violence in the Byzantine world. The shift in the predominant mechanism of coups toward the intrusion of outside forces rendered violent regime change a more straightforwardly military phenomenon than before, and one not sharply distinguishable from other clashes between the territorial regimes of different princes.

The emergence of the appanage also further moderated the likely consequences of failure. No longer were the protagonists of coups simply rebels who had to maintain forward momentum and secure complete

118 Gregoras, *Historia* (n. 30 above), 3:564–65; Kantakouzenos, *Historiarum*, 3:330–60; Zakythinos, *Despotat*, 114–16; Nicol, *Byzantine Family*, 116–18.

119 Cheynet, *Pouvoir* (n. 1 above), 171–73.

120 Doukas, *Istoria*, 73; Chalkokondyles, *Demonstrationes*, 2:81.

121 Barker, *Manuel II* (n. 57 above), 163–65.

122 The same tendencies applied to the earlier revolt sparked by the replacement of the Kantakouzenoi by the Palaiologoi. Nicol, *Last Centuries* (n. 4 above), 157–60, 237–39, 248–50, 285–86, 347, 368, 370–71, 396–98; idem, *Byzantine Family*, 112–13; Laiou, *Constantinople* (n. 4 above), 289–90; Zakythinos, *Despotat*, 1:212–13, 245, 261–62, 265–67; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium* (n. 8 above), 277–84.

success in a timely fashion or see their strength evaporate, leaving them helpless in the face of the brisk reassertion of overwhelming power from the imperial center.¹²³ Now they were usually legitimate coemperors or imperial princes who could assert an enduring claim to authority that the vagaries of fortune could not abolish, and who often enjoyed a lasting hold on sizable parts of the empire. A claimant whose coup failed, like that of John V in 1353, might be able simply to withdraw to territories under his control and prepare to try again. On occasion, those holding an appanage could simply make a peaceable return to ruling it, regardless of the attitude of Constantinople, as when after his defeat in 1390 John VII resumed his government in Selymbria, where his position was secured by Ottoman protection.¹²⁴ For those thwarted in the capital who were able to negotiate a settlement, either immediately or later, a new or restored appanage could constitute a consolation prize, as in the case of Andronikos IV's return to Selymbria in 1381 or the grant of Lemnos to Demetrios Palaiologos in the 1440s. This scope for survival and continued power on the part of the defeated contenders in a coup or civil war naturally increased the prospects for further conflict in the future.

The frequency of challenges for possession of Constantinople in the Palaiologan period was an expression of enduring features of Byzantine politics under conditions of stress, in which the violent imposition of a new supreme leadership was a habitual response to failure, while adversity often drove the empire's rulers to dangerously controversial material and ideological expedients. The capital and the central government apparatus rooted there remained the prime focus of attempts to redress the fortunes of the empire, to shift policy in favor of particular collective interests, or simply to exploit discontent to advance the ambitions of individual dynasts and their adherents. For the empire's potential leaders at least, the imperial city was still the center of the world, and every attempt to seize it was a reaffirmation of its importance. Yet in both process and significance the changed nature of the coup d'état expressed the transformation of the empire's political condition and the capital's place in it. Constantinople

accounted for an increasingly large proportion of the shrinking empire, yet its role as an active force in determining its own destiny and that of its remaining provinces dwindled. The importance of the court and the metropolitan populace in installing and ousting emperors diminished, while that of the provincial or foreign armed forces of competing princes and of the outside powers who often sponsored them correspondingly increased. The enduring strength of the capital's ancient fortifications ensured that the contributions of individuals inside remained pivotal, but these were now increasingly subsidiary, aiding the initiatives of forces from outside rather than acting directly. Though the imperial city remained the principal stage for the denouements of Byzantium's violent internal dramas, the most critical elements of the setting ceased to be the chambers of its palaces, the neighborhoods where unrest fomented, or the public spaces where crowds gathered, as the focus shifted instead to the walls, gates, and peripheral citadels. As Constantinople played a less active part in the conduct of coups, the capacity of victory or defeat there to transform the government of the empire at large, or even the careers of the contenders, was also diminished. The changes of leadership accomplished by seizing the capital came to be confined to the circle of the imperial family, whose personal relationships became increasingly important in initiating and terminating internal conflicts, even when those conflicts were driven by wider social or ideological forces. The distribution of territorial power among the emperor's relatives and the increased scope for survival and recovery after defeat reduced both the permanence of resolutions reached through political violence in Constantinople and their impact on the provinces. Thus the development of the coup d'état reflects the degree to which Byzantium in its last two centuries shifted from being the empire of a city to being the empire of a dynasty.

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123 Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 165–71.

124 Barker, "John VII" (n. 66 above), 222–25.